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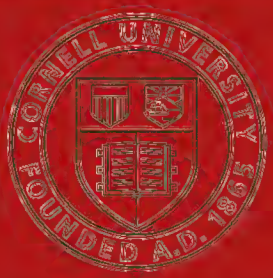

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سقا

THE PEOPLE OF EGYPT

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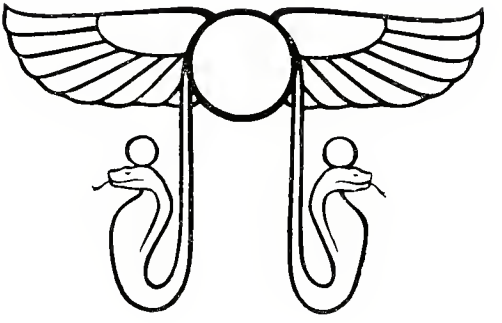

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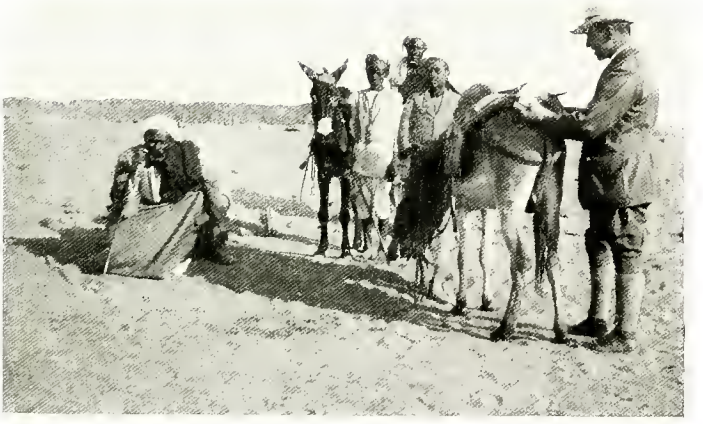

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4. Policeman and Boy - - - *Ascari Balis wa waled*
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6. Syrup-Seller - - - - - *Sharbatli*
7. Cake-Seller - - - - - *Baia Cak*
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Also 37 Illustrations in Black and White, from Pencil Drawings, printed on the Interleaves.

THE PEOPLE OF EGYPT

THE title of this little book of Mr. Lance Thackeray's studies, with brush and pencil, of the people one sees in Egypt has been well chosen, for to speak of Egyptians at the present day is almost impossible. Such a strangely mixed aggregation of Levantine races dwells in the delta and valley of the Nile that it is safer to speak of the people of Egypt rather than of Egyptians. The cry of Egypt for the Egyptians which is beginning to be heard in some quarters seems to voice an ignorance of the country, for the more one knows of Egypt the more one is obliged to ask, "Who are the Egyptians?" It is true that the census classes some ten millions as "natives" and only about half a million as semi-sedentary Bedouins, but the term "native" covers a great assemblage of semi-Egyptian hybrids.

"Let anyone," says Lord Cromer, "who has a general acquaintance with the appearance and physiognomy of the principal Eastern races try if he can give a fair ethnological description of the first ten people he meets in the streets of Cairo.

"The first passer-by is manifestly an Egyptian fellah who has come into the city to sell his garden produce. The headgear, dress, and aquiline nose of the second render it easy to recognize a Bedouin, who is perhaps come to Cairo to buy ammunition for his flint-lock gun, but who is ill at ease amidst urban surroundings, and will hasten to return to the more congenial air of the desert. The small, thick-lipped man with dreamy eyes, who has a far-away look of one of the bas-reliefs on an ancient Egyptian tomb, but who, Champollion and other *savants* tell us, is not the lineal descendant of the ancient Egyptians, is presumably a Coptic clerk in some Government office. The face which peers somewhat loweringly over a heavy moustache from the window of a passing brougham is probably that of some Turco-Egyptian Pasha. The man with a bold, handsome, cruel face, who swaggers by in long boots and baggy trousers, must surely be a Circassian. The Syrian moneylender who comes next will get out of his way, albeit he may be about to sell up the Circassian's property. The green turban, dignified mien, and slow gait of the seventh passer-by denote some pious Sheikh. . . . The eighth must be a Jew, who has just returned from a tour in Asia Minor with a stock of embroideries, which he is about to sell to the winter tourists. The ninth would seem to be some Levantine nondescript, . . . and

the tenth, though not easily distinguished from the latter class, is, in reality, one of the petty traders of whom Greece is so prolific." And besides all these varied types there are the Soudanese, of whom many are to be found in Egypt. There are the Tunisians and Algerians, the Maltese, and a most wonderful variety of half-breeds and representatives of every European nation as well as those of the New World.

The Moslems are made up of Turks and Turco-Europeans, of Egyptians, of Bedouins, of Soudanese, and of others from Tunis, Algeria, and India. The Turks, however, who were the conquerors of Egypt, almost within living memory, have for a long while been cut off from centres of Turkish thought and influence, and by intermarriage have become Turco-Egyptians. They are the ruling classes under the Khedive and his British advisers, and exercise the bitterest hatred in all directions. The British overlords are hated because they watch him closely, and prevent him from plundering the fellaheen; the pure Turk is also both hated and feared, because he is a stronger man, and the natives, whom he regards as his rightful prey, but whose helplessness is defended by the Western power which dominates the land, are disliked or despised.

Although Moslemism is a weakening power in Egypt, its baneful influences still operate tena-

ciously in opposition to the forces which are gradually raising the people. Thus the work of educating and uplifting the women of the country is held back by the Moslem's belief in the rightness of maintaining four legitimate wives and as many concubines as he desires, although, as a rule, the Egyptian restricts himself to one wife. This state of things is largely due to the fact that a man may change his wife as often as he pleases. But there is no doubt at all that the women of Egypt are entering a period of transition of a critical character, and although their emancipation may be slow it has, nevertheless, begun. A few years ago scarcely any girls were sent to the schools: in 1900 they numbered over two thousand, and since then the total has been leaping up. The great trouble, however, is the pernicious custom of early marriages, which takes the girls away from school when they reach thirteen or fourteen years. Old maids are difficult to find in Egypt, and although a man can get rid of his wife by the simple process of repeating to her the words, "Thou art divorced," she is generally able to find another husband in a short time.

The gradual spread of education among the women will alter the opinion of the men, and in time a wife will be more to her husband than an ignorant creature, ranking not very much above the beasts of the field, for whom he has possibly

for a time an appreciation of her physical charms, but certainly a contempt for her mind. How else can a man regard the sex which is not allowed to attend the services in the mosques as though it were without religious perception and the need of spiritual comfort?

The Moslem law does not oblige a woman to wear the veil, but it says, "If thy beauty cause strife among men, inspiring them with love or jealousy in others, then were it better for thee that it should be hid." Not to be veiled would thus proclaim to the world that the individual who exposed her whole face regarded herself as without any attractiveness at all, and in Egypt not even shrivelled old creatures with yellow skins will give up wearing the veil. In Cairo one often sees the occupants of smart carriages with the lower part of their faces covered with only the very thinnest white gauze, but the women one meets in the street generally wear a thick and impenetrable veil.

The nomad Bedouins, who, like the Turco-Egyptians, hold the fellaheen in contempt, are gradually abandoning their nomadic habits, and settling in the villages on the edge of the desert, a state of things due to the wise policy of leaving these wandering people free from any of the duties of citizenship which fall upon the permanent dwellers by the waters of the Nile.

The fellah of Egypt lives a life of unremitting

toil. He goes out to his fields at dawn and works until nightfall, with very little to break the monotony of his existence. The field labour is generally picturesque, and ploughing is still carried on with the traditional yoke of oxen, unless one chances to find such oddly assorted yoke-fellows as a camel and a donkey, or even these two pulling with an ox. There is no need to go deeply into the soil, and therefore the old wooden plough shod with iron is still regularly in use.

The overflow of the Nile brings the fertilizing water to the fields through canals decreasing in size until it reaches the narrow channels between the fields which the fellah controls by cutting an opening wherever he requires the water to flow. The building of dams and other irrigation works has increased the amount of water and the fertility of the land, and thus brought prosperity to the farming population. But the increase in the water-supply does not mean less work for the peasants. They all work, including the women and children. At the tenderest age there are employments for boys and girls, such as watching the cattle in the fields, herding goats, or watering the animals in general. The usefulness of the children makes it surprising that so little care should be taken of infants, resulting in a terribly high mortality, which sometimes reaches the incredible figure of ninety per cent. A recent

writer tells how he actually came across a case of a woman labouring in a field, who, after giving birth to a child, wrapped it in a handkerchief and placed it in the shade beneath a bush, after which she resumed her work. On returning to the infant later on she found that the sun had reached it and that life was extinct! Under such early tests of fitness for a strenuous life the survivors must, indeed, be of tough material.

Those who have observed the fellaheen closely agree that they live very amicably together, and that quarrels are infrequent. This may be partly due to the charm of their phraseology which might well be imitated in many domestic circles of Western civilization. The personal salutations on meeting are always graceful. For "Good-bye," they say, "Until by the will of God I see your face in health"; and when friends meet the greeting is, "I have longed for you, O my brother." Instead of shaking hands the fingers only just touch, after which each kisses his own.

If there should be a café in a village it is a centre for exchange of news and for discussion of the prospects of the crops, but besides this there is practically no break to the round of daily toil save the *mûled*, or religious festival. As at the present time only a few can read and write, books and newspapers have no attraction unless a scribe or perhaps the barber of the

village reads aloud to a group of half-puzzled peasants.

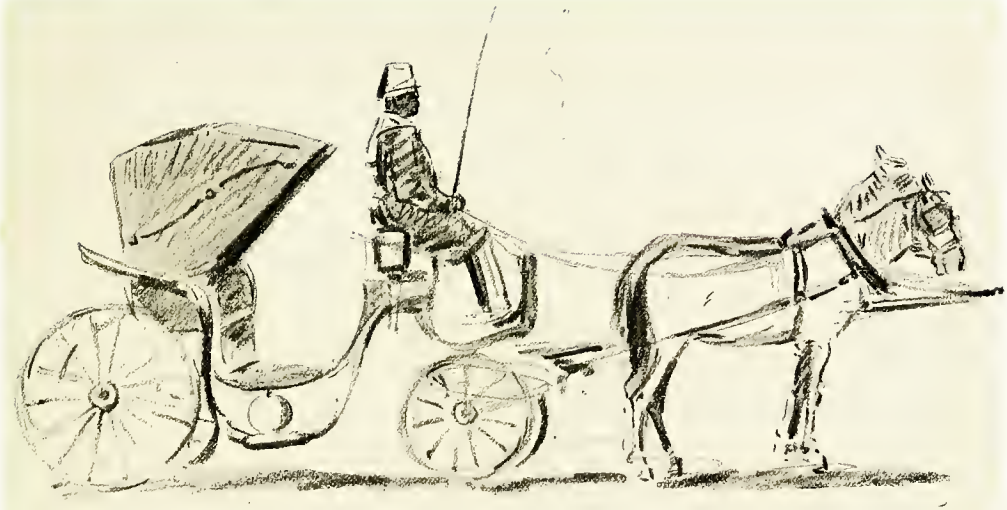
The Coptic population of Egypt come under the title of Christians, and yet through the many centuries of intercourse with the more numerous Moslems they have assimilated not only the language but the manners and the spirit of the Mohammedan people of the land. Edward Lane, in his work on the manners and customs of modern Egypt, which has been the standard work on the subject since 1842, has given the Copts the worst of characters. "They are, generally speaking," he writes, "of a sullen temper, extremely avaricious, and abominable dissemblers; cringing or domineering according to circumstances." Such a character might be readily endorsed by many tourists who have had chance dealings with Copts, but Lord Cromer inclines to the opinion that this is an over-severe judgment. He thinks that even if it be admitted that the unpleasing qualities Lane mentions are to be found among certain of the Copts, they certainly have no monopoly of these characteristics, and that they are equally to be found among the Egyptian Moslems. That the Copts have for long been Christians in little but their name and the places of worship they attend is borne out by the fact that they have developed no higher idea of womanhood than the followers of Mohammed, and they are, according to official

reports, less sober than the Moslems. The Copts, being of more accurate habits of thought than the Moslem Egyptians, were able to make themselves of service to their conquerors the Turks, and thus it has come about that, in the words of Sir John Bowring, "they are to the counting-house and the pen what the fellah is to the field and the plough"; for it is the Copts who are the surveyors, the scribes, the arithmeticians, the measurers, the clerks and learned men of the land. That the Copts can produce men of great ability and admirable character was shown in the successful manner in which the portfolio of Minister of Foreign Affairs was held by Boutros Pasha, whose recent death at the hand of an assassin was a great loss to Egypt.

The changes which have come over the people of Egypt since the British occupation are quite astonishing in spite of all the hatred and antagonism which Western methods of dealing out impartial justice and attacking archaic usages which could not be left alone were bound to raise. Lane describes how a young family was often such a burden to its parents that it was not an unusual occurrence for children to be publicly exposed for sale, and a fellah in dire distress would place his son in a position far worse than slavery. Recruits for the army were often difficult to procure, for the dislike the villagers felt to leaving their homes was so great that they

would resort to any means to obtain exemption. Thus it came about that at one time it was difficult to find a man who had not taken out certain teeth so that he could not bite a cartridge, and cut off a finger, or, worse still, blinded one eye! It used also to be the custom for a fellah whose wife had been unfaithful to tie a stone round her neck and cast her into the Nile. Blood-revenge, in which the lives of three or four persons were required for the death of one, was not uncommon, resulting at times in a species of tribal warfare. Such practices are gradually being forgotten, although there are still plenty of villagers whose murderous instincts are easily excited.

Cleanliness is still largely a monopoly of the Turco-Egyptians, and behind the attractiveness of the bazaars of Cairo there lurks the danger of infectious diseases through the dirt and insanitary conditions of the people. Who, however, can resist the chance of seeing the richness of texture and colour, the strange sense of the presence of the mysterious East, which one finds in an Egyptian bazaar?



CABMAN

Arbaghi

عربجی

Cairo.

SYRUP-SELLER

Argesusi

عرقسوسی

POLICEMAN AND BOY

Ascari Balis we waled

عسكرى بوليس و ولد

PEEP-SHOW MAN

Beta Sanduk el Dunia

بتاع صندوق الدنيا

SYRUP-SELLER

Sharbatli

شربتلی

CAKE-SELLER

Baia Cak

بياع كعك

VEGETABLE-SELLER

Khodari

خضري

EGYPTIAN WOMAN (MIDDLE CLASS)

Horma

حرمة

WAITER (SHEPHEARD'S HOTEL)

Soffraghi

سفرجی

LAMP-LIGHTERS

Illi walla el Lumad

اللى يولع اللمبات

MONKEY BOY

Koradati

فردائی

DANCING NEGRO

Abde Rakes

عبد رقاص

CAIRO

DRAGOMAN

Terguman

ترجمان

WATER-SELLER

Hemeli

حملي

DONKEY BOY

Hammar

حمّار

RUNNING SAIS

سايس

INCENSE BURNER

Mobakharati

مبخراتی

CAIRO

ALEXANDRIAN BOATMEN

Marakbi

مراكبى او فلايكى

BEDOUIN ARAB

Bedawi

عربى او بدوى

SHADOOF MEN

Shaddaf

شداف

SUGAR-CANE SELLER

Baia Kasseb

بياع قصب

SELLER OF ANTIQUES

Baia Antikat

بايع انتيكات

NILE SAILOR

Bahari

بحري

BISHARIEN ARAB

بيشري

POTTER

Fokarani

فخراني

BARBER

Hallaq

حلاق

SPINNER OR WEAVER

Kazzaz

قزاز

WATCHMAN

Gaffir

خفير

WATER-JAR SELLER

Baia Ballassi

بياع بلاليص

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NATIVE WOMAN CARRYING WATER-JAR

Fellaha Hamla el Belassi

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